

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2014**

<http://www.woodyboater.com/blog/2014/01/07/its-still-summer-in-hessel/>

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Today We All Can Bask In The Warmth Of Hessel! Thats Right, Hessel Michigan!



We are going to do something different today, we actually have been waiting some time to do this. Alex prepared this story on the Hessel show last August, but we decided to wait until when it was cold out there to show it. We all could use a little summer today! Here ya go, just like it was going on today. Or maybe it is? Take it away Alex!



The 2013 Les Cheneaux Boat Show has come and gone. Thanks to gorgeous weather, attendance was strong, at 7,500. Of the 120 boats, a good 3/4 of these motored in from local cottages early that morning.



Beyond the dependable (though hardly pedestrian) fare of Gar, Hacker and Chris- triples, utilities, and smaller runabouts, we were privileged to have an uncommon, meticulously restored 1938 19' Sportsman (purchased a few years back, in unrestored condition at the Todd Warner auction). Famous for its rear-facing seat, there are many other details that are unique to this model, including the elegant light green waterline.

Also present was a sleek 1929 25' 6" Kramer / Hacker racer, with elegant hardware, and a pristine Scripps 202 in her bay, making a strong case for retaining original power.



Launches were well represented this year. In fact, the 1st and 2nd “Best of Show” prizes went to an extremely rare 1926 26' Earl Barnes — truly, a work of art! — and a 1912 26' Fay and Bowen — retaining her original (101 year old) topsides and deck planks!





How rare is the Barnes? Earl Barnes (an employee of the Minett factory) made only 20 boats in his own shop. Each one was custom. Only 7 remain.



All categories were nicely represented this year, including the still fledgling (in these parts) Classic Glass.

Here's Peaches, an immaculate, locally-owned 1957 18' Arena Craft.



We even had a 1974 Spectra, wrapped in its time warp color scheme and with its 572 blown Chevrolet motor, a boat that exceeded 132 mph in its day. In period-correct vernacular, this boat was "Bitchin'!"



(If that picture doesn't twist the knickers of the anti-Glass element, nothing will.)



We had a nice assortment of small wooden craft too. A personal favorite (and class winner) was this 1952 15' Old Town. Gotta love the twin vintage outboards.



And last not but least, in a class of its own — literally and figuratively — we were privileged to host a 1964 Whiticar Boat Works 63' cruiser, complete with its jump seat in the bow. Can you imagine how heavenly it would be to ride in that seat on the Great Lakes? I figure the large bell must be to ring for caviar and blinis at cocktail time.

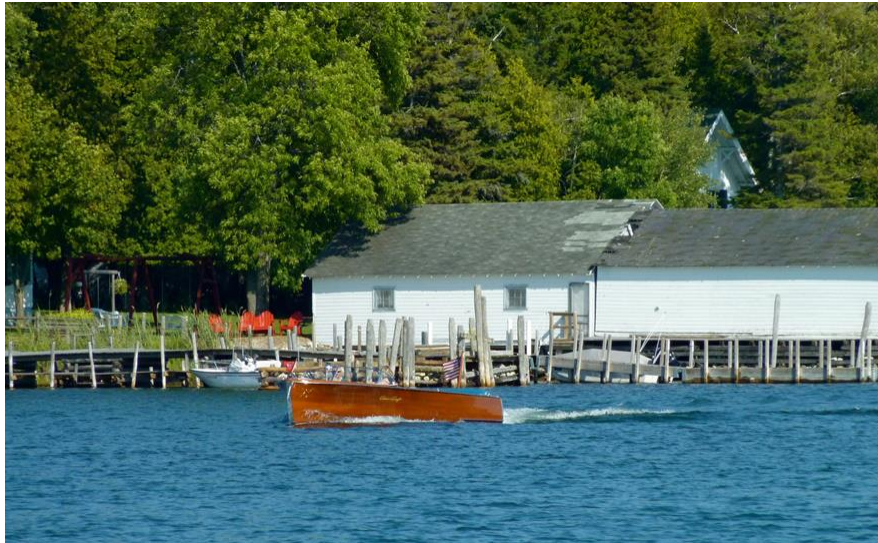




I could go on for pages about the other wonderful boats this year, and include dozens more photos. But I've chosen not to.

After covering this Show the last two years, I struggled for days with what to write this year. In 2011, I covered... the Show. In 2012, I explained in a two-part story, why there is a culture of wooden boats in our area, and what makes our Show different from others. But something was missing. What could I write this year that would be of greater value to readers?

Then it hit me. While the Show is "THE" event in our area each year, even its dedicated organizers and crew of local volunteers would freely admit it is a small subset of what makes the area that hosts it special, and a place that should be high on the bucket list of classic boaters.



The story that begged to be told was how our Show, while a fun day for any attendee or exhibitor, is part of something far more wonderful and rare to discover — Les Cheneaux. The comments readers made after last year's Show validated this. They were as much about the area (or more so) than about the Show itself.

Yes, I know this is a blog about classic boats. But let's be honest here. The experience of owning and/or operating a classic boat is only as good as the memories one makes in it. Better memories are made in an area rich with ways to make them.



This summer, Matt Smith and Matt Byrne (of “Miss Lisa,” 1939 19’ Gar Wood fame) visited this area on separate occasions. Each toured it as it must be seen — by classic boat. And each reached the same conclusion: Les Cheneaux is not an area to see; it’s an area that needs to be experienced.



The experience of this area is why people of all means love to vacation here, and why they have congregated here in their cottages or rental cabins for generations.

It is priceless to those who understand how precious the simplest things in life are...

The sense of freedom one gets looking over the vast Lake Huron water, changing color with every passing cloud.



The incredibly sweet air — an intoxicating perfume of Great Lakes water, cedar trees, sweetgrass, wildflowers, campfires, and hundreds of subtle, other ingredients (yes, including the occasional whiff of un-catalyzed exhaust from a passing boat).





The wild swans, eagles, loons, ducks and great blue herons. The miles of unspoiled beaches — sugar sand in some parts...



...a rock collector's delight in others.





The rustic cottages — ranging from cozy cabins to compounds — the boat houses, and the aged cedar crib docks, with scores of flags, snapping in chorus to a stiff afternoon breeze.



The never-redundant sunsets — worth attending, even on nights when the sun barely appears.



And the night sky full of stars, so bright and clear, one sees the reflection of the Milky Way on the calm water, like the softest blanket.



These are universal joys one finds here, in a place devoid of pretense, loved by folks who are blessed with innate, or infused, or acquired perspective.

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Recently, I had the privilege of meeting a remarkable lady and an 80-year summer resident of our area, Bonnie Mikkelsen. She had this to say about the area.

“Les Cheneaux has been the passion and glue of generations of my family. I’ve been fortunate to travel the world. There are very few places like this one. This area isn’t just beautiful. It’s enchanting. I believe a place like this makes people who come here, better.”

I was struck by her last sentence. After coming to these Islands since 1964 (at age 2), I had never stopped to add-up its contribution to whom I have become.



To understand this, I've spent the last couple weeks observing how my own children interacted with the area. I realized no one gets more out of Les Cheneaux than kids and, by extension, adults who experienced part of their childhoods here.



With some parental and/or self-discipline children here learn, or re-discover, that life has more meaning when the TV, smart phones, and video games are put away. Year over year, they discover nature. And year over year, this helps them discover who they are. When kids are infused in the outdoors, then respecting, valuing, and caring for their surroundings comes naturally.

They learn to spot, distinguish between, and prize wild strawberries, thimbleberries, and raspberries, so abundant, most remain unpicked.



They catch and examine grasshoppers, lightning bugs, mayflies, dragonflies, daddy longlegs, crayfish, minnows, spiders, frogs, and toads.





They make elaborate sand castles, and collect fossils and other cool rocks.







They become stronger swimmers.

They learn the different bird calls. They learn to fish. They see deer, mink, fox, porcupine, raccoon, and other wildlife. They learn how to build and respect a fire. They roast hotdogs and s'mores. And they stay up way past bedtime, watching glorious Michigan sunsets turn into a dark skies planetarium.



As their senses of nature develop, they learn to see, hear, feel, taste, and smell all the ways spring turns to summer turns to fall. They learn that all days, even disappointingly cold, gray, and rainy ones, have beauty too.



Watching my kids, I realized children don't just make memories in Les Cheneaux. They make indelible, lifelong treasures. And, as they make them in this wholesome environment, they build healthy character. They learn what beauty and nature does for them. How this makes them feel. How they can count on these to bring a lift, remain balanced, or rediscover perspective.



Children learn about more than nature here. They learn and embrace family traditions and rituals. They accept the responsibilities of maintaining family cottages. And they acquire the maturity and skills to safely operate watercraft — many of those, classic boats.





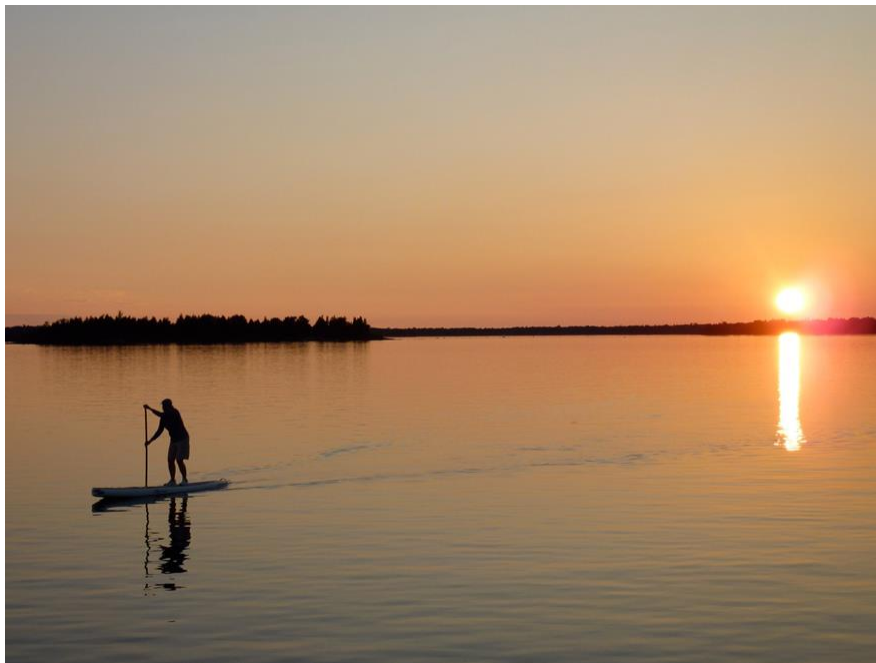
*Photo Texx*

But the area is by no means exclusively appealing to children.

For adults — cottagers or visitors — there's rejuvenation in these Islands. After a few days here, they leave the pressures, anxieties, and responsibilities of the world behind. Slowly they let go. The office, matters less. E-mail, both business and personal, matters less. The news, matters less. Time disappears. The world becomes a simpler, kinder place.

They bond with their families and friends, laugh heartier, live healthier, sleep deeper, and relax down to their souls.

For active adults and kids alike, this area offers so many summertime activities. Sailing, fishing, kayaking, paddle boarding, canoeing, birding (150 species), hiking, golf... The list goes on. Notice how none of these is costly or complicated.



Then, there's classic boating. When you come here, you must bring yours! You'll be in great company.



Total strangers will wave at you on the water. You'll happily reciprocate.



The many other classic boats you pass or peek at in boathouses or at docks will offer you what is essentially a different boat show every day.





To avoid incident, stay in the well-marked channel. But you won't feel constrained. Boating at a good clip from one end of the Islands to the other will take you about 45 minutes, each way.

Want even more space? Venture through the East, Middle, or West Entrance onto open Lake Huron.



There, you'll appreciate how neat it is that Les Cheneaux is in protected waters, yet is part of an enormous, powerful inland sea, with eventual access to the oceans.

There are 36 Islands in Les Cheneaux. That means there are approximately 19,964 left to explore in Lake Huron alone!

As you gaze over the Lake, you'll feel humbled. The waters you are in have taken thousands of lives from storms, fog, collisions, shoals, fires, explosions, and other maritime accidents, many of these, with all hands.

You'll also feel blessed to be here, savoring the freedom only big water can offer.



This article began with a summary of our Boat Show for 2013. I hope I have conveyed in some small way how Les Cheneaux Islands is so much more than our Show. The Islands, and the classic boats tucked among them, are inextricably intertwined.

To experience this area at its best, take a whole week. Bring your family. Bring your boat. This is a destination.

But don't be disappointed if your visit can't encompass Boat Show (always the 2nd Saturday of August).

With all I've described above to experience, how could you be.



Robert Lyle's thought about this article is below:

### 1. **Robert Lyle**

Your remarkable Les Cheneaux photo-story and message about how the Snows affects people, especially children, is spot on. Spending my childhood summers during the 1950-60's at our family's Big LaSalle cabin led to, after 40 years, my 5-book, Mackinac Passage series of young adult novels. As a pharmacist and drugstore owner—not a professional writer—the books became a labor of love generated by my youthful experiences and fond memories of this fabulous area.

January 13th, 2014